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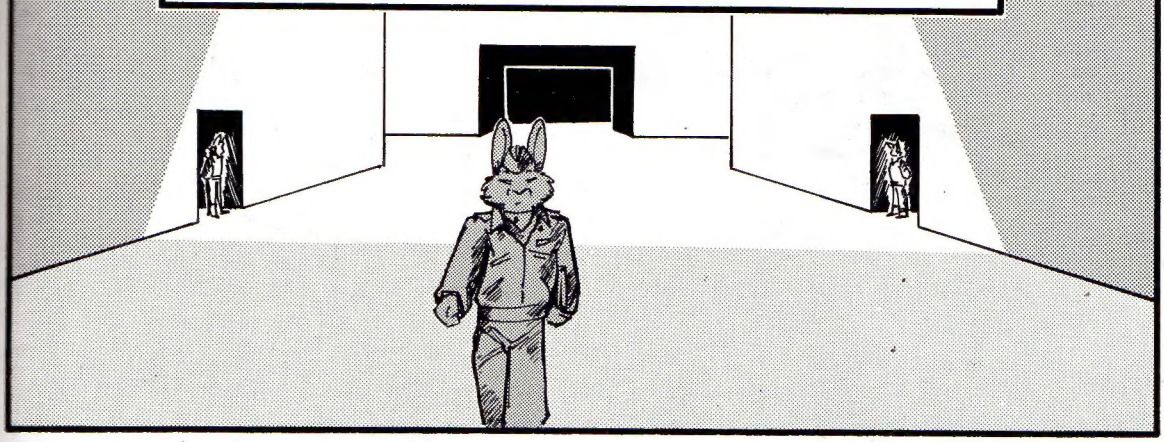
THE NEW ALBEDO

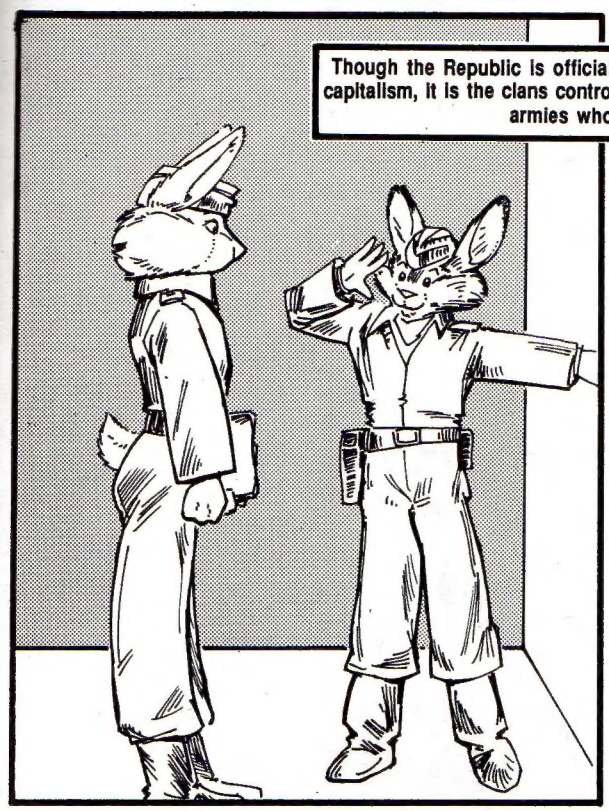
SPLASHY NEW ERMA ON R&R ISSUE

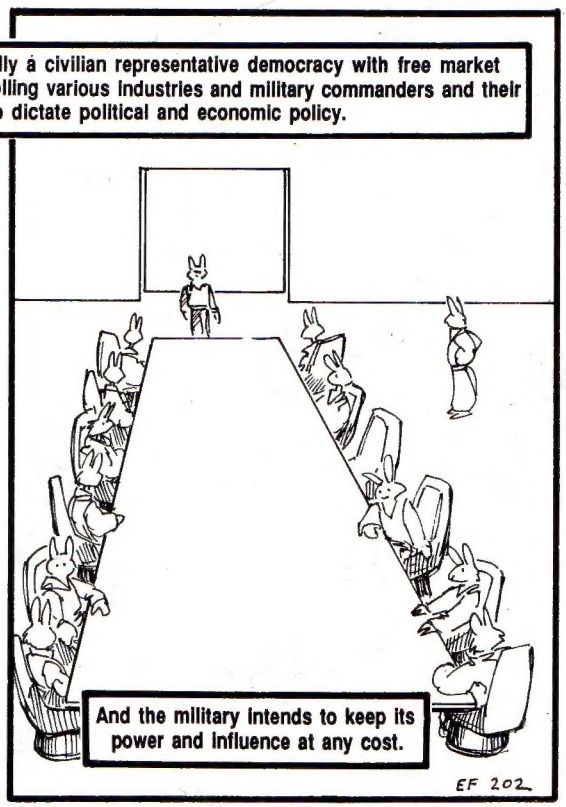
The Independent Lepine Republic had sustained the illusion of unlimited economic growth for most of its existence, and the Great War was an unsuccessful attempt to secure even more capital to fuel the illusion. Now after the war, however, the war economy continues, side-tracking vital capital away from critical long-term reinvestment. At the same time, a runaway cycle of make-work production and endless consumerism demand even more uncontrolled growth.

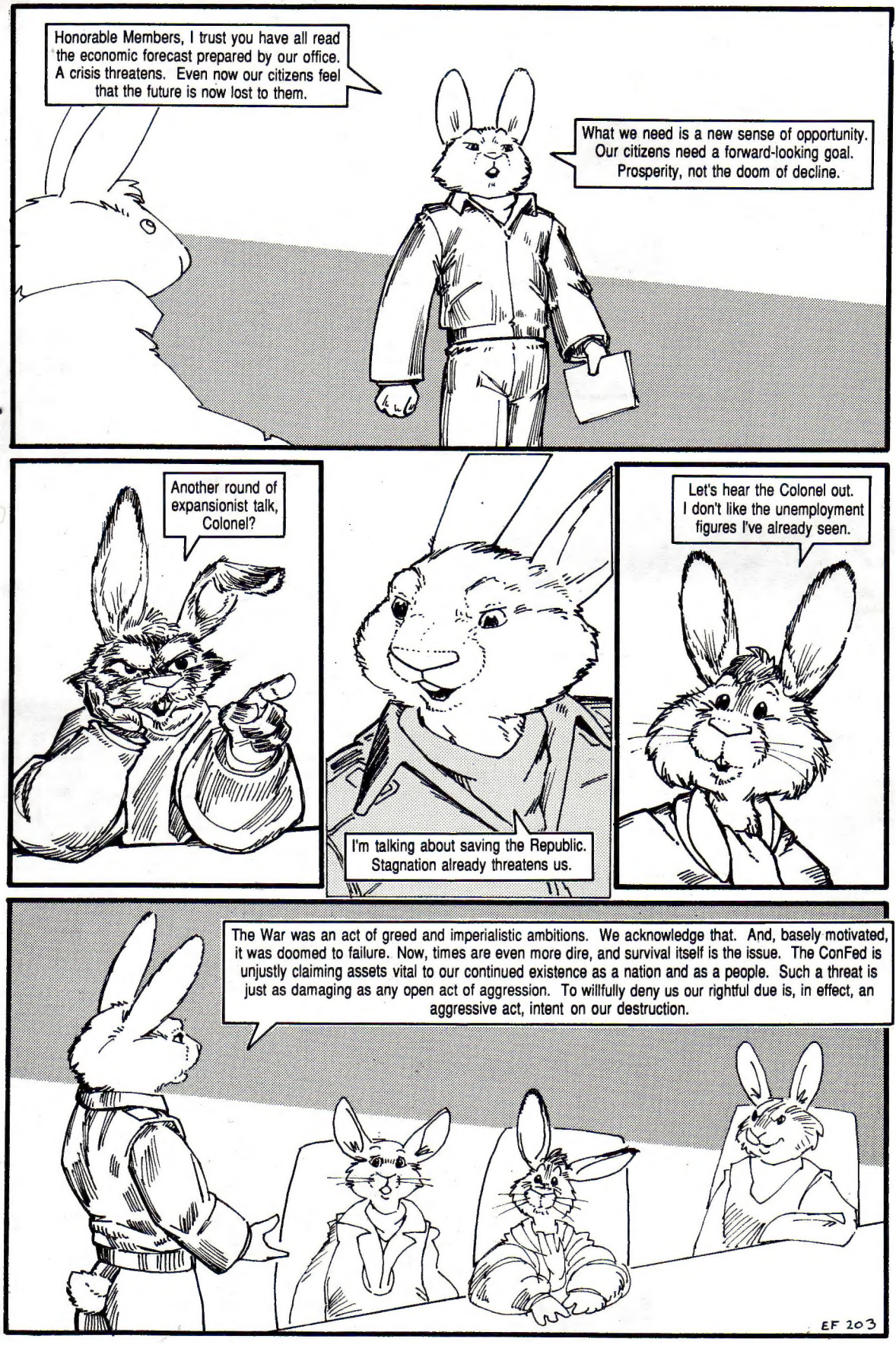
After nearly twenty years of this, limits are appearing in projections of how much longer things can go. While some responsible leaders recognize the approaching crisis, most others feel ideologically obligated to the status quo, and no one is willing to make the kind of sacrifices that could prevent it.

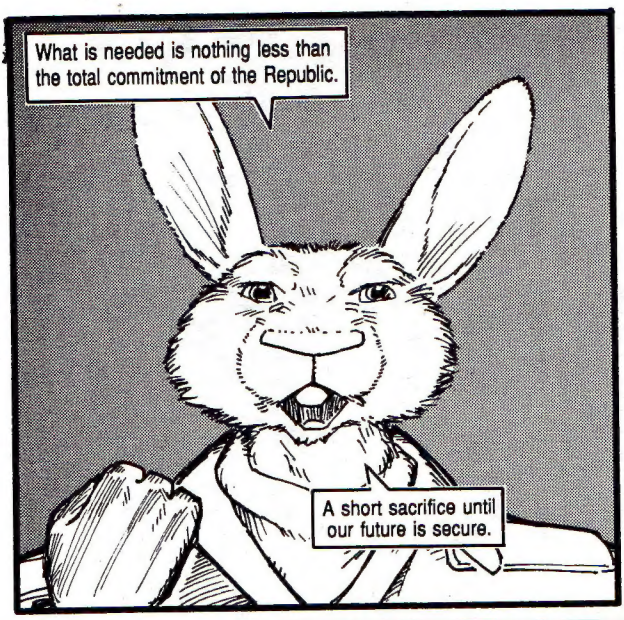


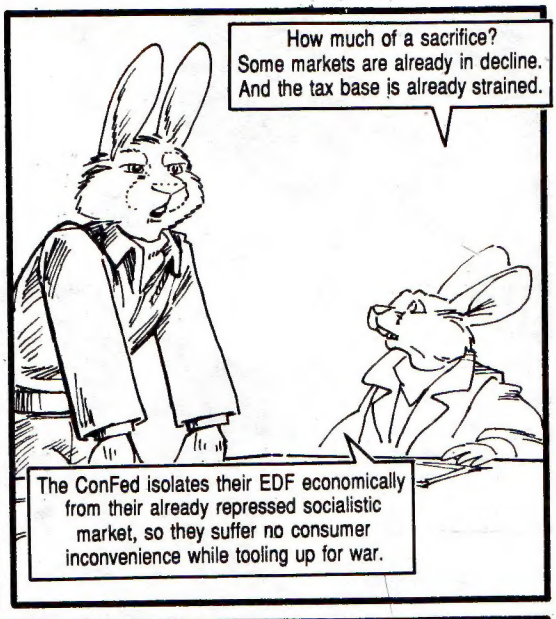
Though the Republic is officially a civilian representative democracy with free market capitalism, it is the clans controlling various industries and military commanders and their armies who dictate political and economic policy.

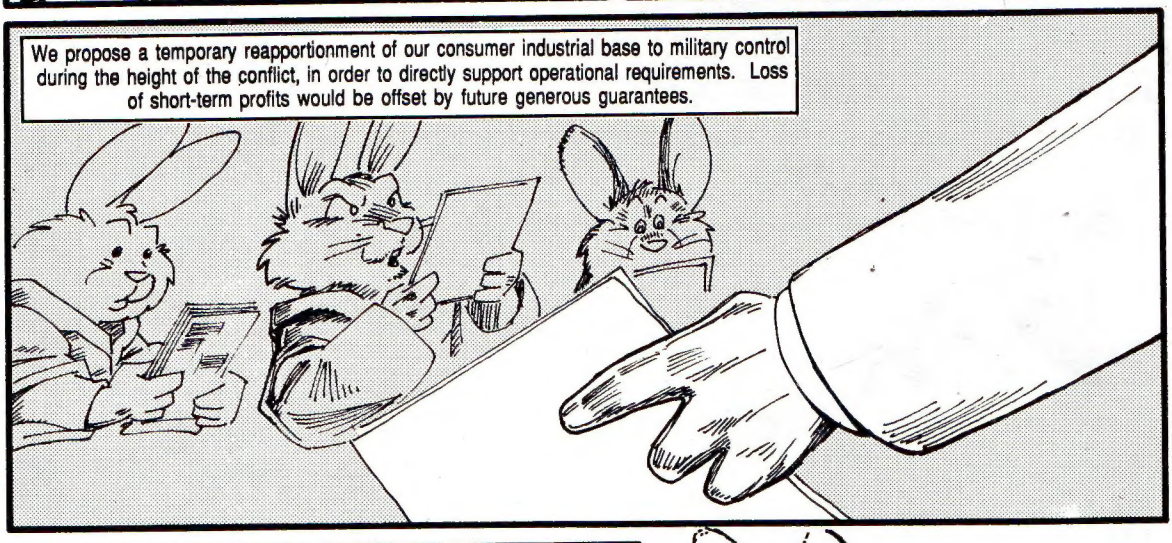


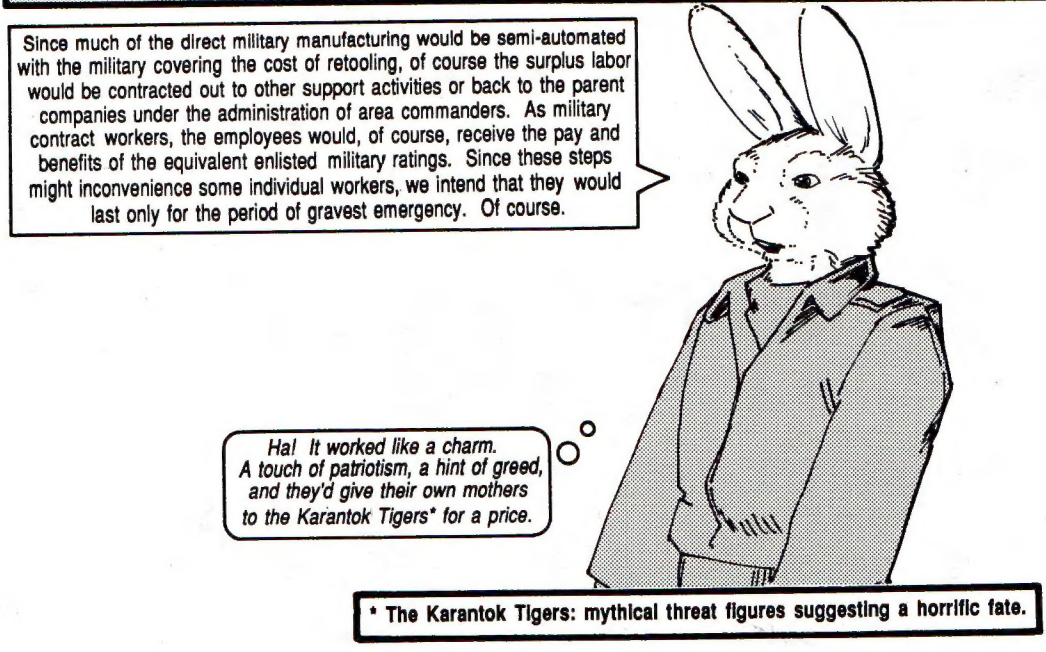



Honorable Members, I trust you have all read the economic forecast prepared by our office. A crisis threatens. Even now our citizens feel that the future is now lost to them.
What we need is a new sense of opportunity. Our citizens need a forward-looking goal. Prosperity, not the doom of decline.
Another round of expansionist talk, Colonel?
I'm talking about saving the Republic. Stagnation already threatens us.
Let's hear the Colonel out. I don't like the unemployment figures I've already seen.
The War was an act of greed and imperialistic ambitions. We acknowledge that. And, basely motivated, it was doomed to failure. Now, times are even more dire, and survival itself is the issue. The ConFed is unjustly claiming assets vital to our continued existence as a nation and as a people. Such a threat is just as damaging as any open act of aggression. To willfully deny us our rightful due is, in effect, an aggressive act, intent on our destruction.
EF 203



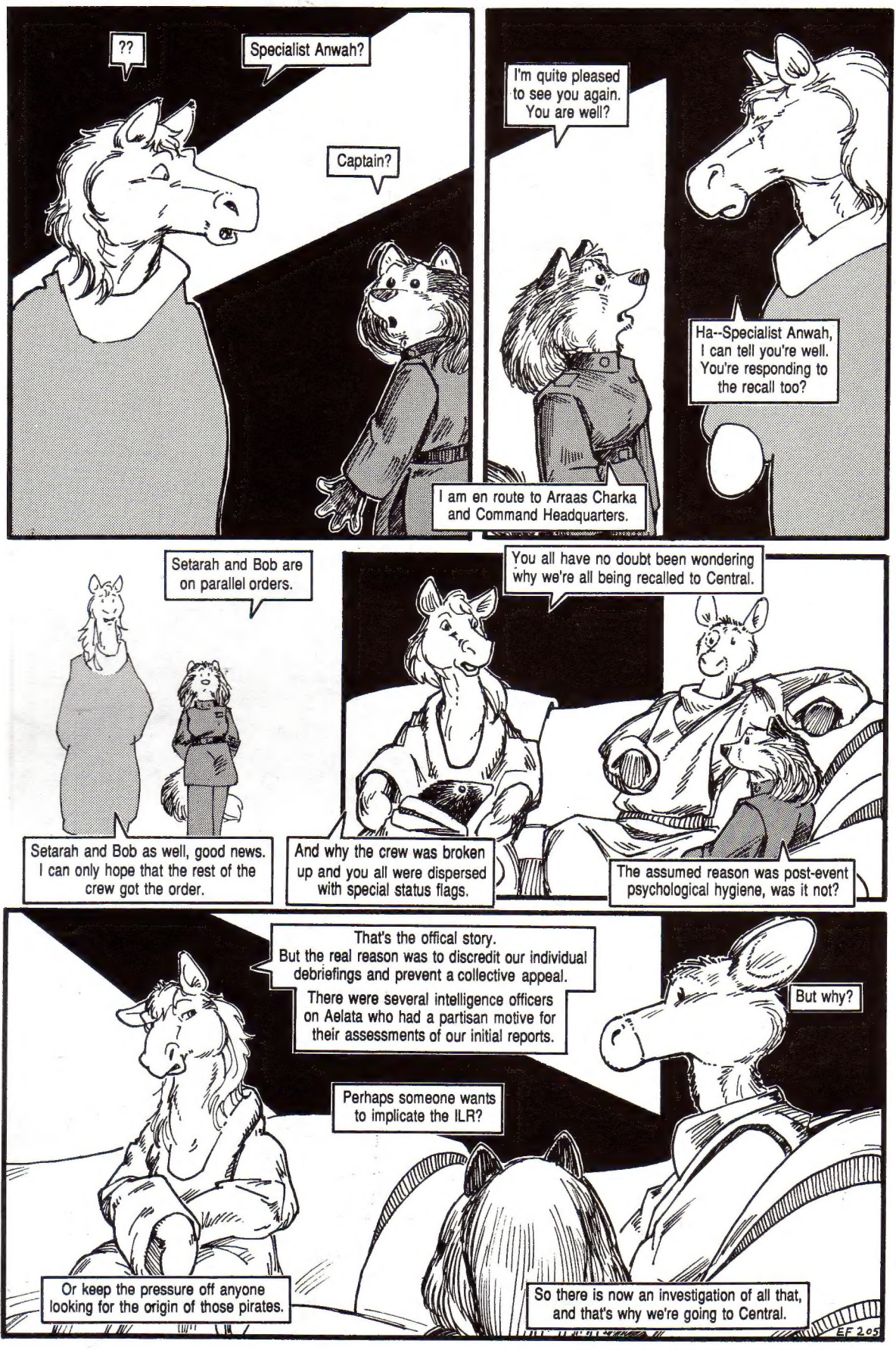




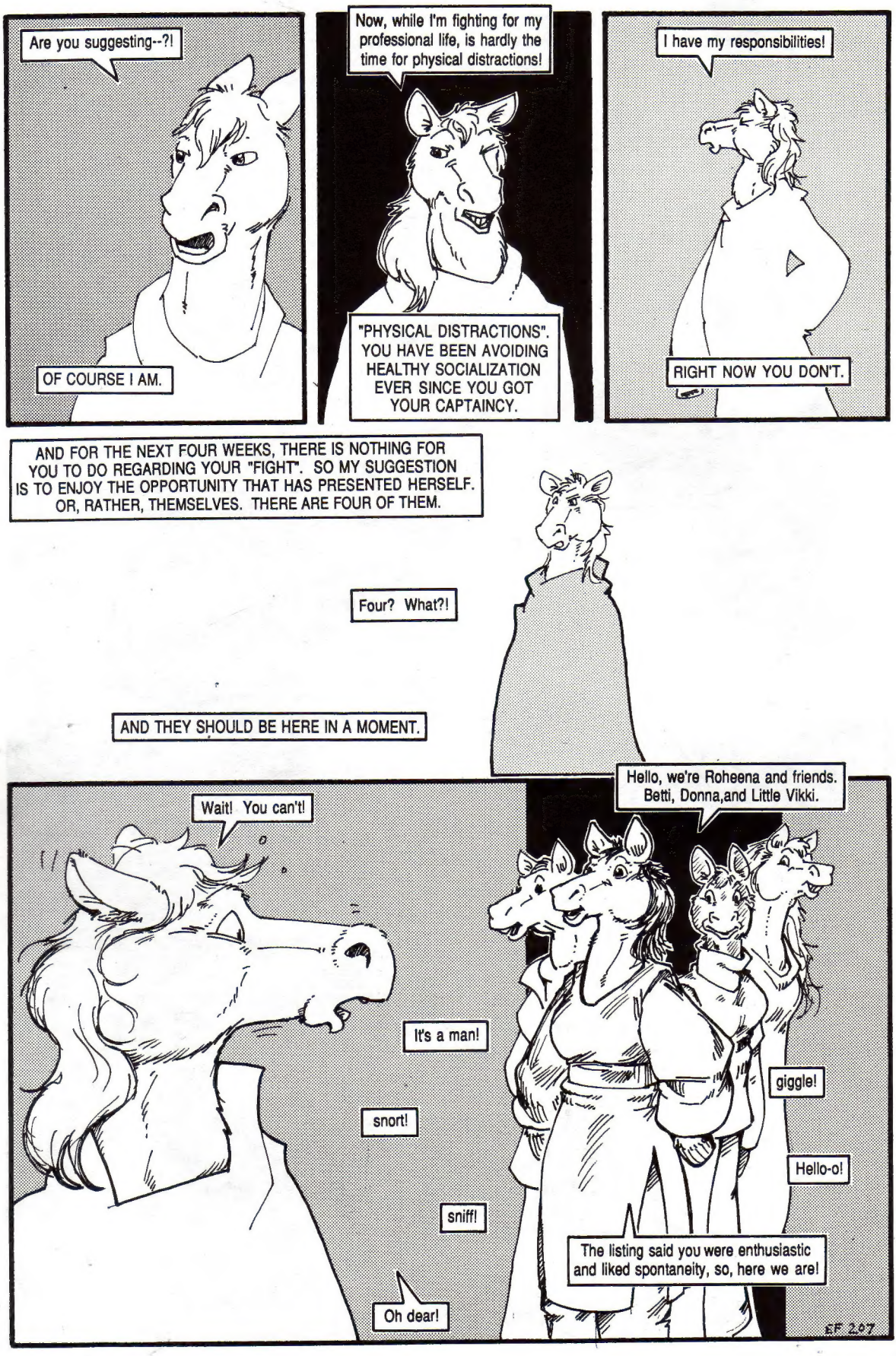


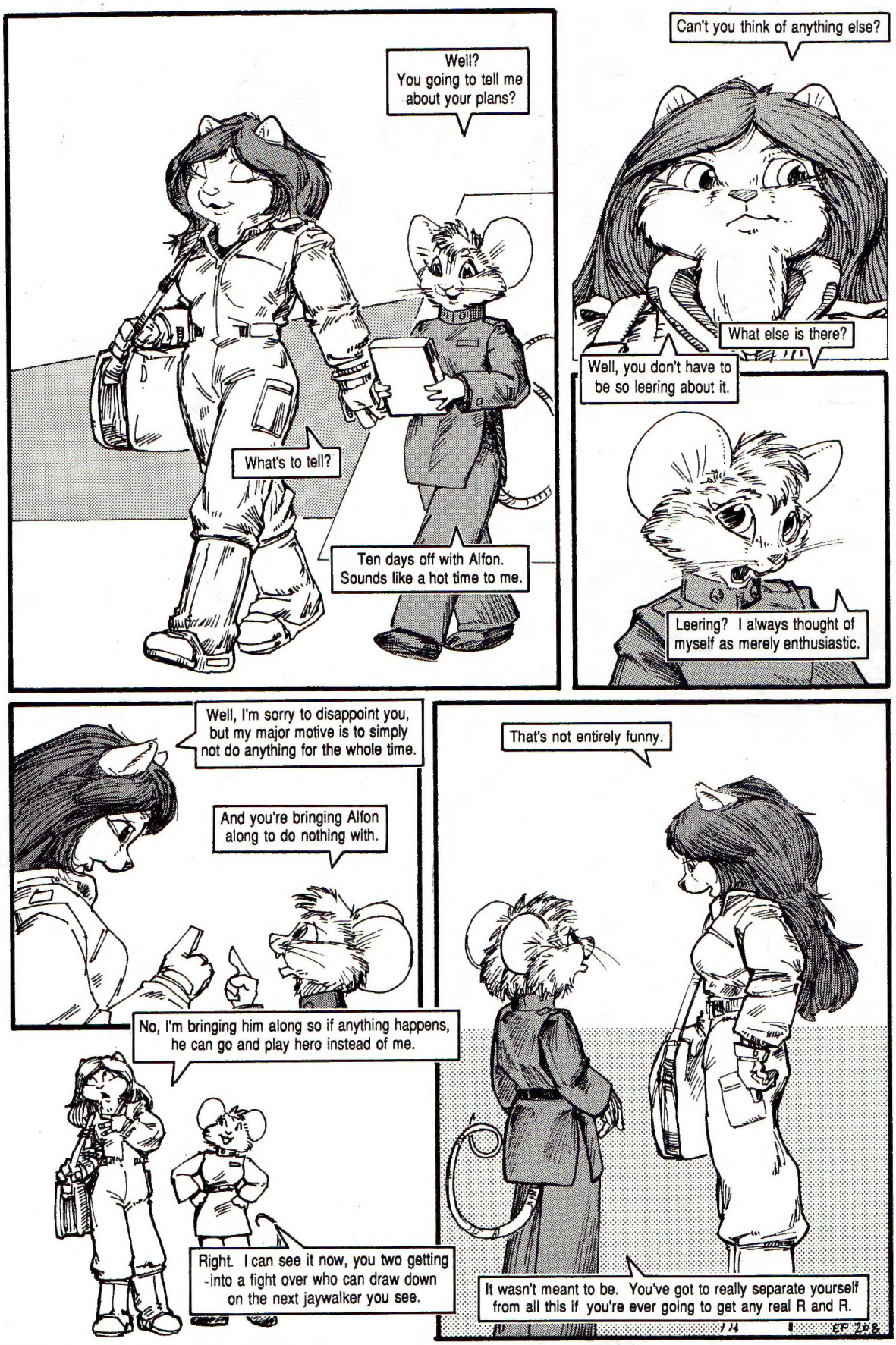
*** The Karantok Tigers: mythical threat figures suggesting a horrific fate.**

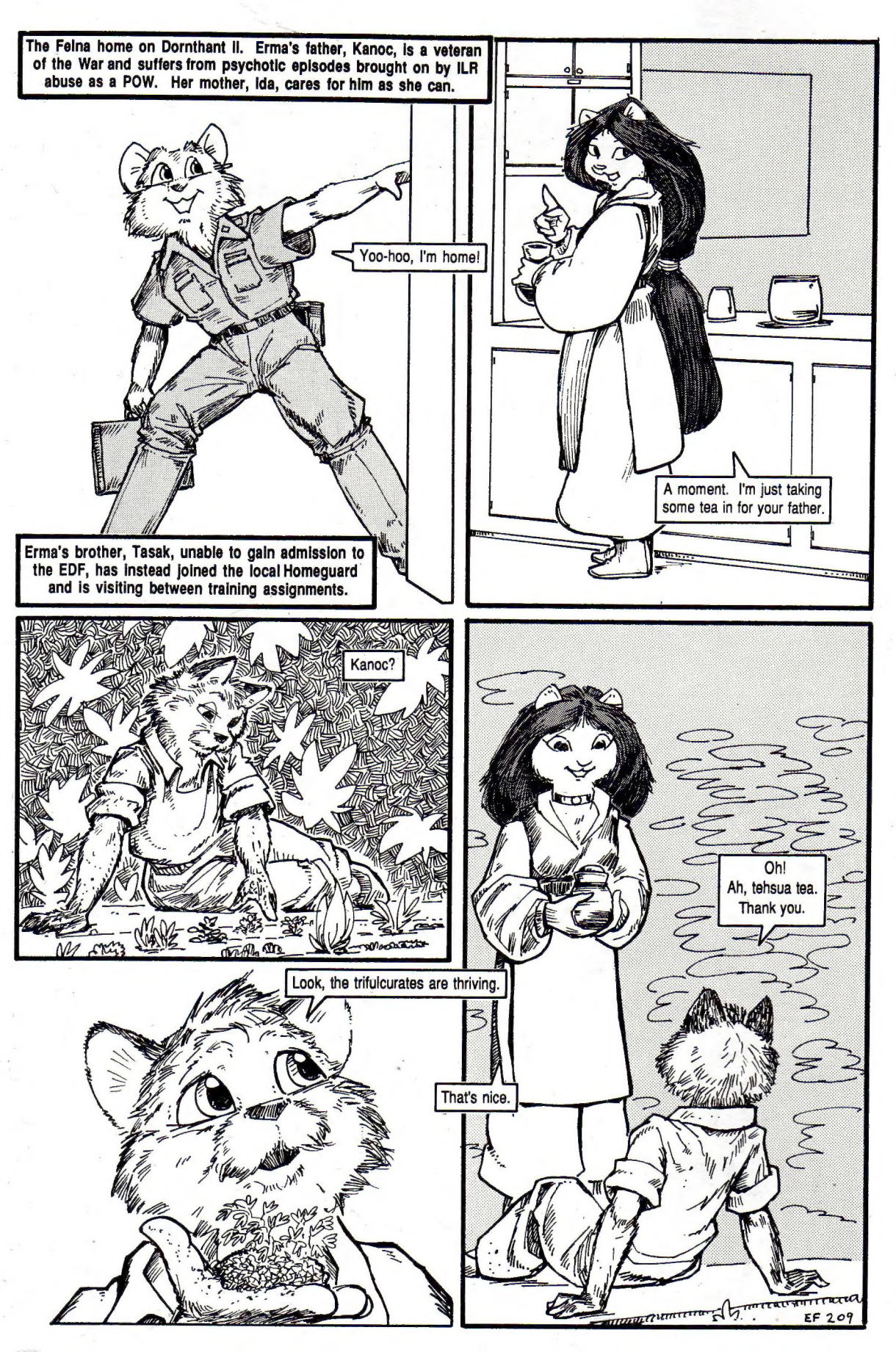
EF 204


??
Specialist Anwah?
Captain?
I'm quite pleased to see you again. You are well?
Ha--Specialist Anwah, I can tell you're well. You're responding to the recall too?
I am en route to Arraas Charka and Command Headquarters.
Setarah and Bob are on parallel orders.
Setarah and Bob as well, good news. I can only hope that the rest of the crew got the order.
You all have no doubt been wondering why we're all being recalled to Central.
And why the crew was broken up and you all were dispersed with special status flags.
The assumed reason was post-event psychological hygiene, was it not?
That's the offical story. But the real reason was to discredit our individual debriefings and prevent a collective appeal.
There were several intelligence officers on Aelata who had a partisan motive for their assessments of our initial reports.
But why?
Perhaps someone wants to implicate the ILR?
Or keep the pressure off anyone looking for the origin of those pirates.
So there is now an investigation of all that, and that's why we're going to Central.
EF 205

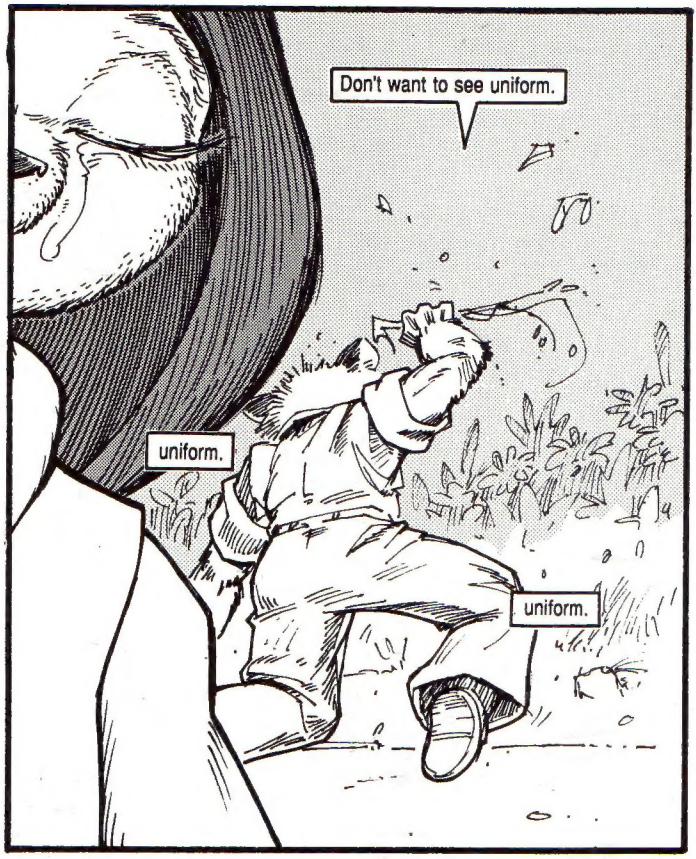
What are we to do?
Most important, record everything you say among yourselves, so that there can be no question of conspiracy. However, matching stories is not the issue here as much as state of mind and subjective impression. There still isn't any real evidence as to who really did it, so intuition will have to do for now.
Go through your personal logs and compare them to the offical record. Discuss your impressions and recollections.
A BIT MELODRAMATIC?
I wanted to emphasize the importance of documentation and security. Any news?
NOTHING OF IMMEDIATE RELEVANCE. HOWEVER--
THERE IS NEWS ABOUT HOME. YOUR FATHER HAS BEEN GRANTED A SEAT ON THE REGIONAL COMMAND ADVISORY BOARD. YOUR MOTHER IS DOING WELL. CHARON KIE HAS BEEN GIVEN A CAPTAINCY. AH, A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE SOCIAL NET. A ROHEENA DIAMET AND HER FRIENDS ARE RECEPTIVE TO SOMEONE LIKE YOU FOR COMPANY FOR THE DURATION OF THE TRIP.
Good for her. Ooh?
EF 2.06


Are you suggesting--?!
OF COURSE I AM.
Now, while I'm fighting for my professional life, is hardly the time for physical distractions!
"PHYSICAL DISTRACTIONS". YOU HAVE BEEN AVOIDING HEALTHY SOCIALIZATION EVER SINCE YOU GOT YOUR CAPTAINCY.
I have my responsibilities!
RIGHT NOW YOU DON'T.
AND FOR THE NEXT FOUR WEEKS, THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU TO DO REGARDING YOUR "FIGHT". SO MY SUGGESTION IS TO ENJOY THE OPPORTUNITY THAT HAS PRESENTED HERSELF. OR, RATHER, THEMSELVES. THERE ARE FOUR OF THEM.
Four? What?!
AND THEY SHOULD BE HERE IN A MOMENT.
Wait! You can't!
It's a man!
snort!
sniff!
Oh dear!
Hello, we're Roheena and friends. Betti, Donna,and Little Vikki.
giggle!
Hello-o!
The listing said you were enthusiastic and liked spontaneity, so, here we are!
EF 207


Well? You going to tell me about your plans?
What's to tell?
Ten days off with Alfon. Sounds like a hot time to me.
Can't you think of anything else?
What else is there?
Well, you don't have to be so leering about it.
Leering? I always thought of myself as merely enthusiastic.
Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but my major motive is to simply not do anything for the whole time.
And you're bringing Alfon along to do nothing with.
No, I'm bringing him along so if anything happens, he can go and play hero instead of me.
Right. I can see it now, you two getting into a fight over who can draw down on the next jaywalker you see.
That's not entirely funny.
It wasn't meant to be. You've got to really separate yourself from all this if you're ever going to get any real R and R.

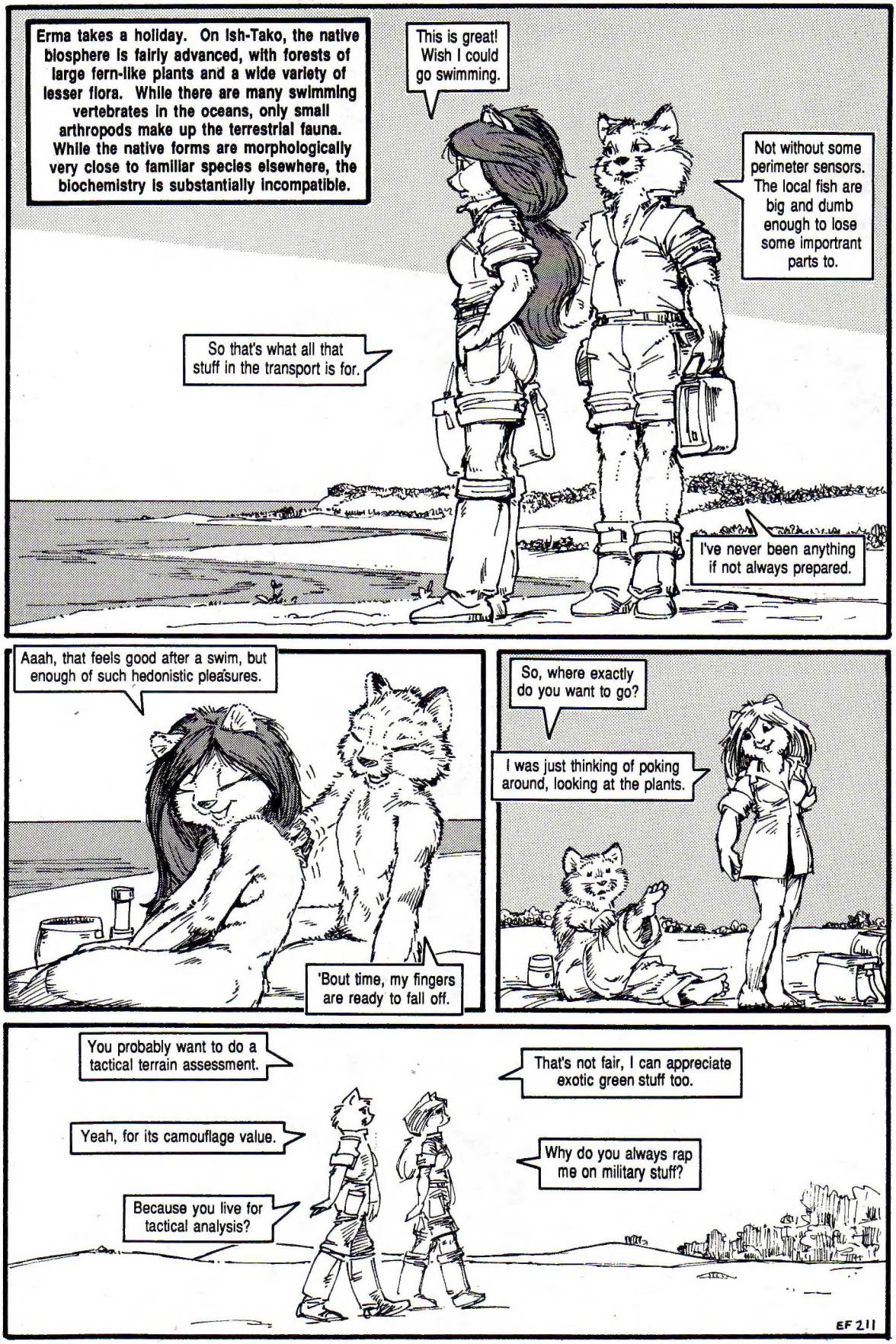

The Feina home on Dornthant II. Erma's father, Kanoc, is a veteran of the War and suffers from psychotic episodes brought on by ILR abuse as a POW. Her mother, Ida, cares for him as she can.
Yoo-hoo, I'm home!
A moment. I'm just taking some tea in for your father.
Erma's brother, Tasak, unable to gain admission to the EDF, has instead joined the local Homeguard and is visiting between training assignments.
Kanoc?
Oh! Ah, tehsua tea. Thank you.
Look, the trifulcurates are thriving.
That's nice.
EF 209

Tasak is here.
Do you want to see him?
Not if he's in some silly-ass uniform.

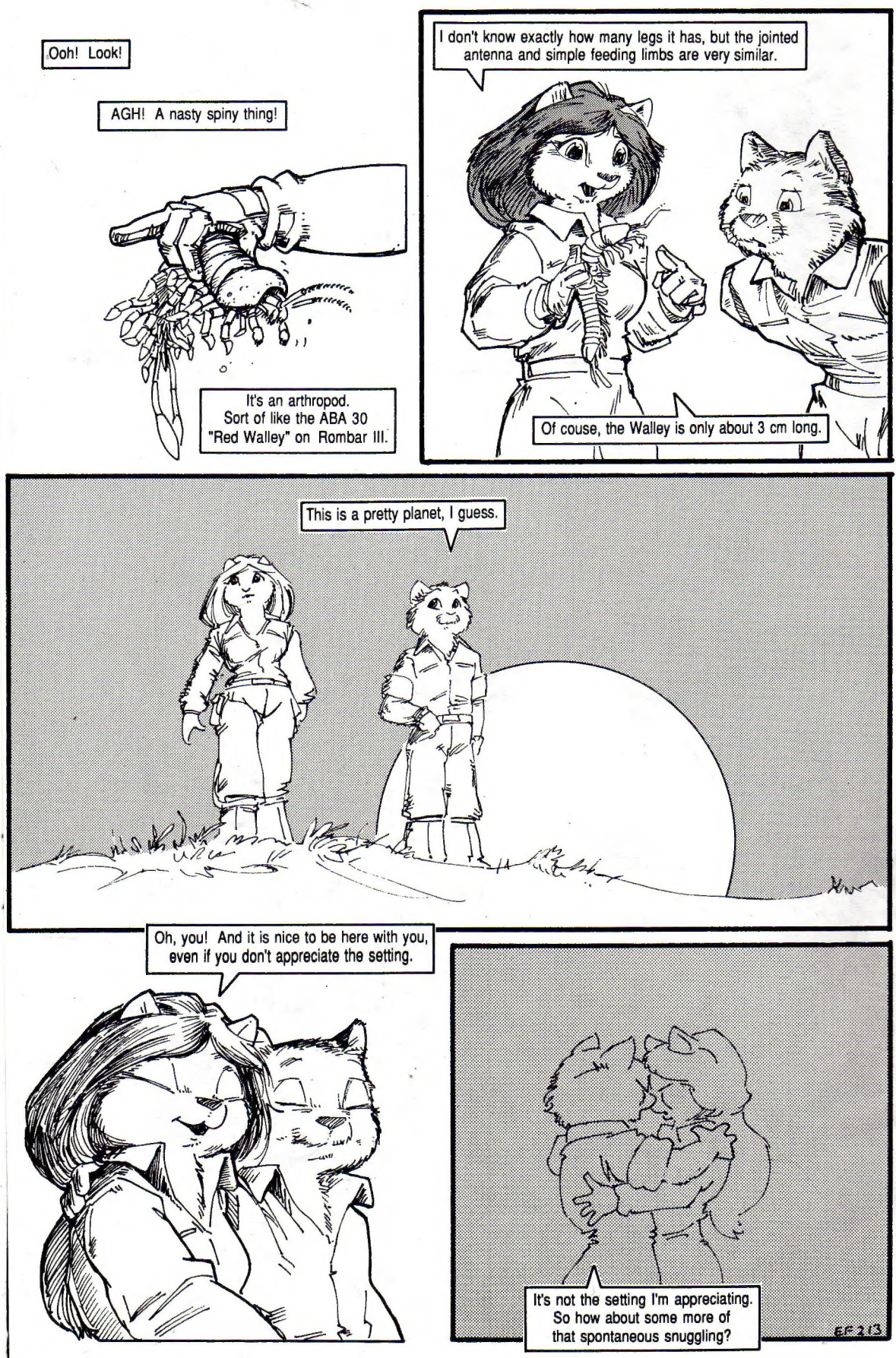

Don't want to see uniform.
uniform.
uniform.

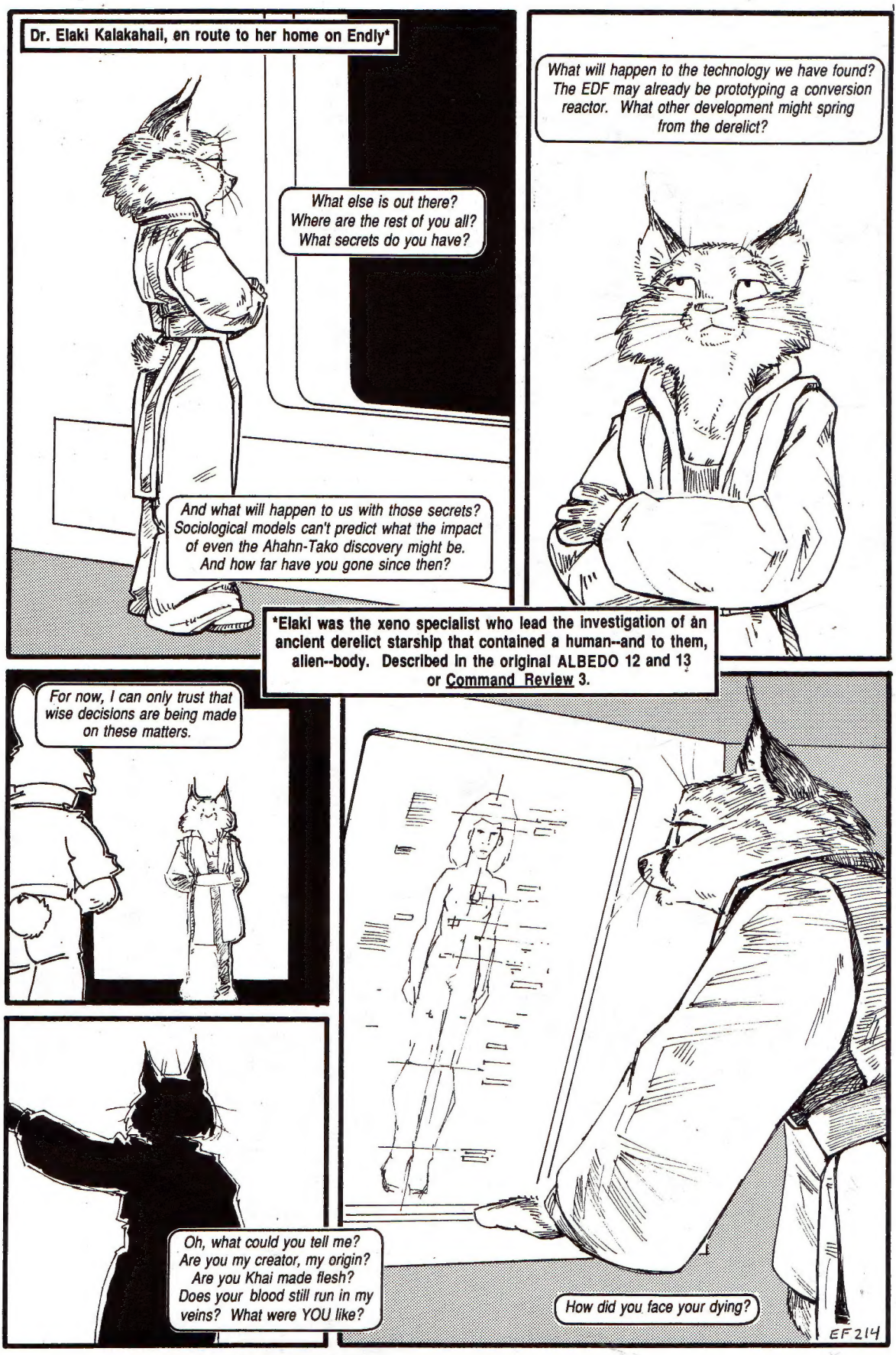
Oh dear--you heard him.
Perhaps you'd better go for now.
I'll call.
Will you be all right?
I'm never in any danger, if that's what you mean.
You know that. Your father never touches anyone--
in or out of these fits--so I'm always safe.

EF 210


Erma takes a holiday. On Ish-Tako, the native biosphere is fairly advanced, with forests of large fern-like plants and a wide variety of lesser flora. While there are many swimming vertebrates in the oceans, only small arthropods make up the terrestrial fauna. While the native forms are morphologically very close to familiar species elsewhere, the biochemistry is substantially incompatible.
This is great! Wish I could go swimming.
Not without some perimeter sensors. The local fish are big and dumb enough to lose some importrant parts to.
So that's what all that stuff in the transport is for.
I've never been anything if not always prepared.
Aaah, that feels good after a swim, but enough of such hedonistic pleasures.
'Bout time, my fingers are ready to fall off.
So, where exactly do you want to go?
I was just thinking of poking around, looking at the plants.
You probably want to do a tactical terrain assessment.
That's not fair, I can appreciate exotic green stuff too.
Yeah, for its camouflage value.
Why do you always rap me on military stuff?
Because you live for tactical analysis?
EF 211

No. It's only with great effort that you can be distracted from being on duty all the time.
Humphf! When have I been waxing military today?
You've been on alert, keeping an eye on the horizon, observing everything.
Now you're being paranoid.
I'm just keeping my eyes open, so if I want to engage in spontaneous snuggling, I can do so without worrying about an audience.
Spontaneous snuggling, eh? What an insatiable creature.
Oh? You don't seem to have any trouble keeping up.
Fascinating.
All these class C ferns.
This is kind of interesting after all.
Didn't know you were into botany.
Sure, my father is a collector of xenoflora.
These are so tall. I've never seen anything I couldn't step over before.
EF212


Ooh! Look!
AGH! A nasty spiny thing!
It's an arthropod. Sort of like the ABA 30 "Red Walley" on Rombar III.
I don't know exactly how many legs it has, but the jointed antenna and simple feeding limbs are very similar.
Of couse, the Walley is only about 3 cm long.
This is a pretty planet, I guess.
Oh, you! And it is nice to be here with you, even if you don't appreciate the setting.
It's not the setting I'm appreciating. So how about some more of that spontaneous snuggling?


Dr. Elaki Kalakahali, en route to her home on Endly*
What else is out there? Where are the rest of you all? What secrets do you have?
And what will happen to us with those secrets? Sociological models can't predict what the impact of even the Ahahn-Tako discovery might be. And how far have you gone since then?
What will happen to the technology we have found? The EDF may already be prototyping a conversion reactor. What other development might spring from the derelict?
*Elaki was the xeno specialist who lead the investigation of an ancient derelict starship that contained a human--and to them, alien--body. Described in the original ALBEDO 12 and 13 or Command Review 3.
For now, I can only trust that wise decisions are being made on these matters.
Oh, what could you tell me? Are you my creator, my origin? Are you Khai made flesh? Does your blood still run in my veins? What were YOU like?
How did you face your dying?
EF214